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 TO RUEHAD/USINT BAGHDAD 4890
 RUDKKR/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 9150
 INFO RUFHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 8009
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 C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 077609

E.O. 12356DECL: OADR
 TAGS: SHUM, IZ, TS
 SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST: DETENTION IN IRAQ OF
 - TUNISIAN NATIONAL (BENNOUR, NEJI MOHAMED)

1. (U) ON BASIS OF AN AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEAL, SENATOR WARNER'S OFFICE HAS INQUIRED ABOUT CASE OF NEJI MOHAMED BENNOUR, A TUNISIAN ARRESTED IN JUNE 1983 WHILE WORKING AS MANAGER OF BAGHDAD'S AL-SADEER NOVOTEL HOTEL. DURING INTERROGATION, BENNOUR WAS ALLEGEDLY TORTURED BY ELECTRIC SHOCK AND BEATING. ALTHOUGH TWO OTHER NOVOTEL EMPLOYEES ARRESTED AT THE SAME TIME (INCLUDING AMCIT -- ROBER SPERLING) HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN RELEASED, BENNOUR'S EXACT WHEREABOUTS AND STATUS REMAIN UNCERTAIN. BENNOUR CASE HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN PUBLICIZED IN FRANCE, IN PART DUE TO FRENCH ROLE IN OPERATING AL-SADEER NOVOTEL.

2. (C) SPERLING HAS WRITTEN TO REQUEST "ANY IDEAS" DEPARTMENT MAY HAVE TO ASSIST NEJI BENNOUR. SPERLING ENCLOSED A REPORT FROM BENNOUR'S BROTHER ALI (STRICTLY PROTECT), WHO VISITED NEJI ON FEB. 14 IN THE COMPANY OF TUNISIAN CONSUL CHADLI ELBLICH. ALTHOUGH ACCOMPANIED BY TWO SECURITY OFFICIALS AND AN MFA OFFICER, NEJI BENNOUR NONETHELESS WAS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE THAT HE WAS FORCED TO CONFESS, DESPITE HIS INNOCENCE, TO CHARGES OF ESPIONAGE

AND RAPE. THE ESPIONAGE INCLUDED "ECONOMIC" REPORTING ON THE PRICE AND AVAILABILITY OF TOMATOES IN THE MARKET PLACE AND TRANSLATING IRAQI NEWSPAPERS FOR HIS FRENCH EMPLOYERS.

3. (C) FOR BAGHDAD: IN VIEW OF CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST, DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR VIEWS ON WHETHER AN APPROACH TO THE GOI COULD BE JUSTIFIED ON BASIS OF THE LINK TO SPERLING. OR IS IT LIKELY A DIRECT APPROACH TO THE GOI MIGHT WORSEN BENNOUR'S PRESENT TREATMENT OR PREJUDICE OUTCOME OF HIS CASE? POST MAY WISH TO CONTACT TUNISIAN OR FRENCH EMBASSIES TO EXPRESS OUR HUMANITARIAN CONCERN AND INQUIRE HOW WE MIGHT ASSIST. ANY FURTHER INFORMATION YOU MAY DEVELOP WOULD ALSO BE APPRECIATED FOR OUR RESPONSE TO SENATOR WARNER.

4. (U) FOR TUNIS: DEPARTMENT WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE YOUR COMMENTS ON THE BENNOUR CASE.

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PAGE 002
TOR: 171950Z MAR 84

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